

GETTING LOST



Brad Silberling's fond memories of Sid and Marty Krofft's '70s children's TV series **LAND OF THE LOST** landed him the gig directing a big screen version, starring Will Ferrell.

Can you talk about your own initial relationship with the TV program of *Land of the Lost*?

BRAD SILBERLING: I was the prime target as a kid in 1974 through 1976, watching on Saturday morning from my home in the west end of the San Fernando Valley. I was an avid watcher of the show.

Why? What did the show provide that engaged you so much?

Sid and Marty Krofft, whether out of innocence or genius or something in between, mashed this thing together that kids love, such as dinosaurs and futuristic alien creatures and parallel universes with quasi-alien reptile guys. They took all of the things that kids love and were fascinated by and put them in one show. It was audacious. I couldn't intellectualise it at that age, but I knew I had to watch it every week. Kids like dark survival stories and it had natural suspense. I was fascinated.

How did you come to work on the film project? Was it that youthful association?

Will [Ferrell] is at fault here. We had lunch one day, although we had never worked together. He told me he had the rights to the show and wanted to do it as a feature film.

I had not seen the DVD or reruns but I had such vivid memories of the show. What was crazy was how many of those memories stayed with me.

Did all of those vivid memories box you in any way with the images you wanted to present for the film?

Oh no. It was just the opposite. All of those memories that stayed with me were actually an inspiration because they inspired me for story and sequences and character. A lot of other stuff from the show might have burned off but so much of the core essentials stayed with me, and I knew I needed to harness those.

What were those essentials to you?

They ran from everything like the generic specifics to the Sleestaks, creatures that I thought were impenetrable that had giant shark eyes, to the giant crevasse that they always had to escape over. I also remember the crystal matrices in the caves. I recall the banjo. What the hell was a banjo doing in the theme song? I always remember it and



accepted, it but why was it there? This was a prehistoric show that had sci-fi elements so what was a banjo doing there? I finally got to ask Sid about it one day and he said that they had seen the film *Deliverance* and loved the banjo sound, so they just put it in their show. That is crazy, but it works.

In this age of CGI effects, you chose to put as many practical images as possible in the film. Outside of Grumpy, so much of what we see is almost old-fashioned in its approach...

That is about honouring part of the original show that really tweaked my imagination. Sure Sid and Marty had limited resources, but they only fueled the imagination of the kid. I knew we couldn't go back and be as crude as the original show was, but I knew

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I wanted to physically build something more modern. The film needed to play for adults and kids, but I knew I could build with enough detail to honour what I had seen years ago. We still went out to the desert for some sequences and like you said, the only major CG work we had to do was Grumpy, and that was only because none of us wanted the film to be a satire. If we had done stop motion and puppet dinosaurs then you would have never believed in the Moby Dick story between Rick and Grumpy. It was important to have this lethal dinosaur in pursuit of this guy who keeps making wrong choices and insults his intelligence.

Why was it necessary to change the make-up of the family dynamic from a father and his two kids to three adults who didn't know each other? Was it to take the project into a more adult approach?

There were a number of things. We had in the original show a Dad who had this son who looked like 16 or so and belonged on a soap opera, and a daughter. We knew we wanted Rick to evolve emotionally in this story. As we meet him in the beginning, he wouldn't have been able to have a functional relationship long enough to have two kids so at the end he can open up to a relationship with Holly. We wanted that, and also to have him play being a guy as an adult that has aspects that are quite childlike. That was our choice to change around the characters.

Last year in WALL•E, music for the musical *Hello Dolly* was utilised as a pivotal story device and here you use *A Chorus Line* in much the same capacity. Why the sudden use of these songs?

In our case, it was used more for a sense of embarrassment for Rick Marshall. It was not that he liked show tunes, because he admits that he loves show tunes and thinks they are a prime indicator of the human

condition. His embarrassment comes from the fact that he failed. On a food binge, he was challenged to scrounge around his building looking for parts to build this device and had to use an iPod for his hard drive. That came from an idea that I had because I knew the Tachyon Amplifier would be lost when they arrived in this land, it had to be something that he heard and not just saw. We knew that during the course of the movie they would be searching for it and so we had to be able to qualify where it was as it kept moving. The best way for that to happen was if we kept hearing it. So we started with that idea and then just began to have fun with it. So we talked about it and thought this guy would love *A Chorus Line*, but then what song from that show? It actually all worked backwards from where we knew the joke would be, and then we chose the song.

You have an amazing group of comedy actors at your disposal, but you also have a finished script. How much elasticity do you give them in allowing improvisation on set?

In the end as a director, you want to tell the story as well as you can and use your instruments as well as you can. The

dream for me is to have actors like Will and Danny McBride. They don't just go off and improvise. They are writers themselves so they don't like to keep going off the written page. They always start from a script basis and then they nudge each other. The nice thing is to encourage everyone. Time isn't cheap. Film is cheap. So it is ridiculous to not try and mine the possibilities.

Audiences are quite savvy nowadays when it comes to special effects. What do you hope they will take out of this movie when they see it?

I hope they will feel that they are not being bludgeoned by wall-to-wall special visual effects. I hope they find something refreshing in this old school high tech – low tech approach that is very well executed. There is really top artistry. We didn't do what *300* did and come in later and make it all with a computer, that it is so stylised that you don't believe you are there. You can watch *The Wizard of Oz* and be a bit distracted by the lighting of the forest, but then the magic sucks you in. I hope audiences feel the same with us.

***Land of the Lost* is out on DVD and Blu-ray on October 21.**

